

1972-30

Lincoln Home

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • ILLINOIS



National Parks Centennial 1872-1972

On February 11, 1861, Abraham Lincoln, president-elect of the United States, stood bareheaded in a cold rain and spoke to the people of Springfield before leaving for Washington, D.C.:

My Friends: no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everything for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

He had come to Springfield, the seat of Sangamon County and a city of 1,400 people, on April 15, 1837, as the law partner of John Todd Stuart. Carl Sandburg tells the story of how Lincoln walked into Joshua Speed's store and asked the price of bedclothes. Seventeen dollars was the answer. "Cheap as it is," Lincoln said, "I have not the money to pay, but if you will credit me until Christmas, and my experiment here as a lawyer is a success, I will pay you then. If I fail in that I will probably never pay at all." Speed took pity on this "gloomy and melancholy" face and offered to share his living quarters above the store. Lincoln accepted and a friendship was born.

Though Lincoln was a new resident of Springfield, he was not a stranger to the town. Since 1834, Lincoln had represented Sangamon County in the Illinois General Assembly and helped to move the capital from Vandalia to Springfield. The prairie city was growing rapidly. A newspaperman wrote in 1839 that Springfield contained "a throng of stores, taverns, and shops . . . an agreeable assemblage of dwelling houses very neatly painted, most of them white, and situated somewhat retiringly behind tasteful frontyards."

For Lincoln, the young lawyer and up-and-coming State legislator, Springfield possessed opportunities which could only enhance his already promising future. Here Lincoln could meet politicians and local leaders from all over the State. One was Stephen A. Douglas, a State senator, who defeated



Lincoln in the 1858 election for the U.S. Senate and whom, among others, Lincoln defeated for the Presidency in 1860. And here he met Mary Todd, his wife-to-be.

This picture, taken in 1860, shows Lincoln and his son William standing in the frontyard.

Mary Todd came from a prominent family. She was born in Lexington, Ky., on December 13, 1818, the daughter of Robert Smith Todd, president of the Bank of Kentucky. She grew up amid all the comforts which the times and area offered: she went to private school which only children of the "best families" attended, and slaves waited on her. Her family and the society in which she moved put great stress on one's upbringing and family. In short, she grew up in much different surroundings than did the man who became her husband. And when she and Lincoln decided to marry, her family found it difficult to accept.

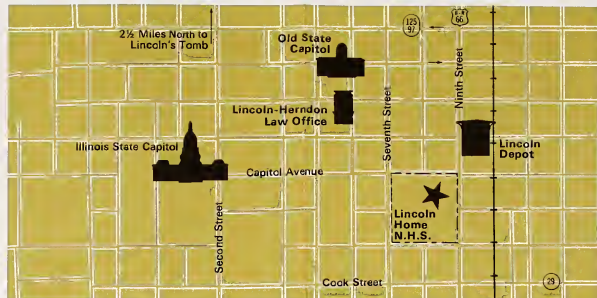
Mary Todd came to Springfield in 1839 to live with her sister, Elizabeth, who was married to Ninian Wirt Edwards, the son of a former Governor of Illinois. A cousin of Mary Todd was Lincoln's law partner, and it is likely that this connection led to an introduction. Their relationship waxed and waned as the months passed, but in the fall of 1842 they decided to marry. On the morning of November 4, 1842, Lincoln went to the home of Dr. Charles Dresser, the Episcopal minister, and told him, "I want to get hitched tonight." Lincoln and Mary wanted to be married in the minister's home because of her family's opposition. But when her family found out that she was determined to go through with it, they relented and the ceremony took place in the Edwards' home that night.

The Lincolns began their married life in Springfield's Globe Tavern. Room and board cost them \$4 a week. Here on August 1, 1843, Robert Todd Lincoln was born. He was the first of four sons and the only one to grow to manhood.

The Lincolns soon found that a boardinghouse was not a good place to raise a child, and on January 7, 1844, Lincoln signed a contract to buy Rev. Charles Dresser's house at Eighth and Jackson Streets. Lincoln gave Dresser \$1,200 in cash and a lot valued at \$300.

In this house the other three Lincoln children were born: Edward Baker, on March 10, 1846; William Wallace, December 21, 1850; and Thomas, April 4, 1853. Here too, their second son died on February 1, 1850. It was a hard blow for the parents who loved and indulged their children beyond the accepted standards of the age. William Herndon, a later law partner and early biographer of Lincoln, thought the children were "brats." Lincoln often would take them into the office and forget them as he became immersed in a law problem. They scurried all over the place, got into every drawer, and drew pictures on any piece of paper close at hand. Lincoln was oblivious to it all. Herndon could not abide such behavior, yet he dared not say anything because he knew Lincoln would side with the boys.

By 1841, Lincoln had served four terms in the Illinois General Assembly. He was ready and anxious for bigger things, namely a seat in Congress. In February 1843, Lincoln wrote to Robert S. Thomas, an influential Whig, that "if you should hear any one say that Lincoln don't [sic] want to go to Congress, I wish you as a personal friend of mine would tell him you have reason to believe he is mistaken." Lincoln had to wait, however,



until 1846 to be nominated by the Whigs. On election day, August 3, he polled a majority of 1,262 votes over two opponents. The first session of the 30th Congress was to convene December 6, 1847. In October, after renting the house to Cornelius Ludlum for \$90 a year and reserving the "North-upstairs room" for storage of their furniture, the Lincolns set off for Washington, going by way of Lexington to visit Mary's family. After an arduous stagecoach and railroad trip, they arrived in the Nation's Capital on December 2.

Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War soon made him unpopular with his constituents. Though he voted yea on all supply bills for the army, Lincoln continually charged that "the war with Mexico was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced." Not the least issue in the debates was that of slavery. Whether these newly won territories would be open to slavery was the most serious question before the 30th Congress. The debates over the war and the Wilmot Proviso, which would have prohibited the extension of slavery to any territories acquired from Mexico, showed Lincoln the explosiveness and divisiveness of the slavery question.

Before even going to Washington, Lincoln had decided to serve only one term, as tradition in his district more or less required. Thus in the spring of 1848, he returned to Springfield and his law practice, probably glad to be back home.

For the next 10 years, Lincoln practiced law, rode the circuit, and, after 1855, became increasingly involved in the politics of the young Republican party. In 1854 he made speeches in behalf of Richard Yates who was running for reelection to Congress. Lincoln ran for the General Assembly to strengthen the ticket. He won, and Yates lost. In 1855, Lincoln ran for the U.S. Senate but lost. One year later, at the first Republican national convention in Philadelphia, the Illinois delegation nominated him for Vice President. He lost again, but more and more people were beginning to recognize his name. Two events then made him a national figure: the Lincoln-Douglas debates in the Illinois senatorial campaign of 1858, and his

speech to the Young Men's Central Republican Union of New York City at Cooper Union on February 27, 1860, which brought him to the attention of influential Republicans in the Northeast.

At the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago, William H. Seward of New York, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, and Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania were the leading contenders for the party's presidential nomination. All these men had enemies and were either too conservative or too radical on the slavery issue for one wing or another of the party. Lincoln was a new man, he had no enemies, and most people considered him a moderate. Through the political astuteness of his managers, he got the nomination and went on to win the election. Three months later, Lincoln left for Washington. He never returned to Springfield and this house.

THE HOUSE

The house was built in 1839 and is typical of that period. It was a story-and-a-half building until 1856, when the Lincolns raised it to two stories. Wooden pegs and handmade nails hold together the native hardwood and white pine.

When the Lincolns left for Washington in 1861, they sold their household furnishings. Many pieces were burned in the Chicago fire of 1871 and others have been lost. Some furniture, however, has been recovered and is now in the home.

The State of Illinois, which previously administered the site, was assisted in its restoration work by the Abraham Lincoln Association of Springfield and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Illinois.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The national historic site is on (Business) U.S. 66. A few blocks north, Ill. 97 leads to the Lincoln Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery and on to the reconstructed town of New Salem. The four square blocks comprising Lincoln Home National Historic Site include many of the homes of the neighbors of the Lincolns. These will be restored to their original appearance. Within walking distance are the Depot, the Old State Capitol, the Lincoln-Herndon Law Office, and the Illinois State Museum.

Lincoln Home National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Springfield, IL 62701, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR